

South Dakota National Guard

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

SD National Guard hosts 31st annual Legislative Dining-Out

PIERRE, S.D. – The South Dakota National Guard hosted the 2015 Legislative Dining-Out at the Ramkota Hotel and Convention Center in Pierre, Thursday, Feb. 5. The annual tradition has brought Guardsmen and the state Legislature together for a formal evening for the last 31 years.

The atmosphere, while formal, includes deep-rooted traditions which lighten the mood and provide both members and guests not only plenty of laughs, but a chance to learn some of the organization's history, traditions and an opportunity to recognize individual and unit achievements.

"The Guard is an organization that is rich in history and tradition," said Maj. Corey Norris, SDNG congressional action contact officer. "This event provides the Guard an opportunity to honor the legislators by hosting them at a traditional military event where we highlight our significant accomplishments to the community, state and nation."

A video highlighting the many accomplishments made by the men and women of the SDNG in 2014 was shown to state legislators in addition to comments from Gov. Dennis Daugaard and Maj. Gen. Tim Reisch, the SDNG adjutant general. The National Guard also recognized a family, an employer and a public servant with awards recognizing their contributions to the SDNG mission.

Pro Patria Award – Minnehaha County Sheriff's Office

The awards portion of the dining-out began by presenting the Minnehaha County Sheriff's Office with the 2014 South Dakota Employer Support for the Guard and Reserve Pro Patria Award.

The Pro Patria Award is presented annually to one employer in the state who provides the most exceptional support of our national defense through leadership practices and personnel policies that support their employees who serve in the National Guard and Reserve.

"The sheriff's office has a strong commitment to their employee's military service," said Maj. Lona Christensen, executive director for the SD ESGR committee. "This is evident from their hiring policies all the way through their promotion policies."

Some of those policies include partnering with the Hero2Hired program to recruit military members and veterans to be part of their team, allowing applicants with military service to use service time towards the minimum years of experience requirements, and creating a VA approved on-the-job training program so employees can utilize their GI Bill benefits.

"The men and women of the Minnehaha County Sheriff's Office have done a great job in supporting our Soldiers in the Guard and Reserve," said Sheriff Mike Millstead, after accepting the award on behalf of the Minnehaha County Sheriff's Office. "We will continue to do that."

Spc. Nathan Obeslo, a member of the 1742nd Transportation Company, the most recent South Dakota National Guard unit to return from deployment, and a corporal in the jail division within the Minnehaha County Sheriff's Office, nominated his employer for the award.

Accommodations are made for employees on military leave to have tests proctored by their military commands and interviews conducted via Skype, allowing them to compete for promotions while on military leave.

The sheriff's office implemented a policy which helps service members in the reintegration process allowing them to return to the exact assignment and position they left.

The sheriff personally keeps in contact with deployed service members. He works hard to ensure that employees don't miss out on opportunities because of military obligations and works to have the employee rescheduled for specialized training.

"Employers are inextricably linked to the nation's defense by sharing their most precious assets, their employees," said Christensen to the audience, just before presenting the award. "Minnehaha County Sheriff's Office is deserving of this recognition for their outstanding contributions to our military services. Minnehaha County Sheriff's Office leadership exemplifies the patriotic spirit that is alive and well here in our great State of South Dakota."

The Williamson Militiaman Award – Secretary of Veteran Affairs Larry Zimmerman

The SDNG next awarded the 2015 Williamson Militiaman Award to retired South Dakota Army National Guard State Command Sergeant Major, and current S.D. Secretary of Veteran Affairs, Larry Zimmerman.

The Williamson Militiaman Award, established in 1987 by Maj. Gen. Ronald F. Williamson, recognizes an individual who exemplifies the spirit of the citizen-Soldier as shown by their community leadership, their support of the National Guard and the defense of the country.

Zimmerman served both state and nation for over 26 years in uniform, beginning with his 1973 enlistment into the U.S. Army. He served for three years at Headquarters, 3rd Brigade, 4th Infantry Division at Fort Carson, Colorado. Following a break in service, he joined the SDNG in 1989 and served in various roles and leadership positions over the next 23 years.

He deployed to Afghanistan in November of 2007 with an Embedded Training Team and was eventually assigned as the operations officer for Afghan Regional Security Integration Command-North.

In May of 2009, he was named the seventh state command sergeant major for the SDARNG providing advice and guidance to the two different adjutant's general on matters pertaining to enlisted Soldiers and their families.

"Upon assuming his role as secretary of Veteran's Affairs, he hit the ground running," said Reisch, while introducing Zimmerman. "In his vision to be the voice for South Dakota's veterans, he unveiled "Operation RAV" – an aggressive campaign to 'reach all veterans' in South Dakota. This campaign was the first of its kind either locally or nationally.

"I can personally testify to this man's commitment to enhancing the lives of veterans," continued Reisch. "Both as my state command sergeant major and as a fellow cabinet secretary, he has always made taking time for Soldiers and veterans part of his daily routine. It is truly his passion."

Past recipients of the award include: Former Adjutants General Phil Killey and Harold Sykora; former U.S. Senators Tom Daschle and Tim Johnson; former Governors William Janklow and Michael Rounds; and current Governor Dennis Daugaard.

The Adjutant General's Family Award – The Hilmoie and Schmidt Family

To conclude the awards portion of the evening, Reisch awarded the 2014 Adjutant General's Family Award to the Hilmoie and Schmidt Family of Tea and Baltic.

"As the adjutant general, I recognize the vital importance of our families to the success of our National Guard mission," said Reisch. "This award recognizes family members who have supported their service members in a truly exemplary manner while managing family, careers, or even hardship, all the while not seeking recognition for their sacrifices."

This year's recipients were Master Sgt. Sara Hilmoie, the administrative assistant for the South Dakota Air National Guard's 114th Fighter Wing commander and Family Group Volunteer, her husband and daughter, Michael and Katelyn Schmidt, and her mother, Melva Hilmoie.

"It's pretty amazing to be selected and recognized at this level for helping others," said Sara Hilmoie, following the event. "I hope that we can live up to significance of this award."

Over the years, Sara has volunteered much of her time serving the families and members of the 114th Fighter Wing, which include volunteering at the National Guard youth camp and spending many hours recruiting for the all-volunteer organization that runs the annual camp.

"Whenever our fighter wing has a special event, you can bet you will see Sara involved in a capacity way beyond what is required of her full-time job," said Reisch.

Sara even recruited her mother, Melva, to help with these activities and join the Family Volunteer Group.

"It wasn't long before Melva also became a frequent participant in any volunteer event on base and even stepped up on short notice to serve as secretary of the Family Volunteer Group when the position was open," said Reisch. "Melva was soon recognized as a top volunteer and was awarded Volunteer of the Year in 2013 for the Air Guard."

Mike and Katelyn have been avid supporters of the Volunteer Program and Sara's involvement in it.

"The countless hours they have given up so Sara can help with deployments, events, meetings, and planning, are too numerous to mention," said Reisch.

Following the awards ceremony and bringing the evening to a close, Gov. Daugaard addressed the Soldiers and Airmen in attendance, specifically thanking them for their continuous support on missions both at home and abroad.

"The Soldiers and Airmen of the South Dakota National Guard are truly the most dedicated, capable and reliable men and women that one could ever hope to meet," said Daugaard. "Whether it's a time of war or a time of a disaster here at home, you have proven time and time again that South Dakota can count on you. Thank you for your sacrifices, your patriotism and your hard work."

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High resolution photos are available at www.flickr.com/photos/southdakotationalguard



150205-Z-CW157-057: The Minnehaha County Sheriff's Office is presented with the 2014 South Dakota Employer Support for the Guard and Reserve Pro Patria Award during the South Dakota National Guard Legislative Dining-Out at the Ramkota Hotel in Pierre, S.D., Feb. 5, 2015. The award is presented by Gov. Dennis Daugaard to Minnehaha County Sheriff Mike Millstead (center) and Spc. Nathan Obeslo, employee (far right). Also pictured from left is Maj. Gen. Tim Reisch, adjutant general of the SDNG, and Mr. Ron Mielke, ESGR-SD chair. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. 1st Class Theanne Tangen/Released)



150205-Z-CW157-070: S.D. Secretary of Veteran Affairs Larry Zimmerman (center right) is presented with the 2015 Williamson Militiaman Award by (from left) Maj. Gen. Tim Reisch, SDNG adjutant general, Gov. Dennis Daugaard and Maj. Gen. Ronald Williamson (retired), during the South Dakota National Guard Legislative Dining-Out at the Ramkota Hotel in Pierre, S.D., Feb. 5, 2015. The award recognizes an individual who exemplifies the spirit of the citizen-Soldier/Airman as shown by their community leadership, their support of the National Guard and the defense of our country. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. 1st Class Theanne Tangen/Released)



150205-Z-CW157-084: Master Sgt. Sara Hilmoie (center right), of the South Dakota Air National Guard's 114th Fighter Wing, and her family, husband and daughter, Michael and Katelyn Schmidt, and her mother, Melva Hilmoie, are presented with the 2014 Adjutant General's Family Award by Gov. Dennis Daugaard (left) and Maj. Gen. Tim Reisch (right), SDNG adjutant general, during the South Dakota National Guard Legislative Dining-Out at the Ramkota Hotel in Pierre, S.D., Feb. 5, 2015. The award recognizes those family members who support their service members in an exemplary manner while managing family, careers, or even hardship, all the while not seeking recognition for their sacrifices. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. 1st Class Theanne Tangen/Released)

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